**How to incorporate the science of well-being into the introductory psychology course**

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Summer is over, the new school year is underway and I am sure you are thinking of ways to make your classes more meaningful and enjoyable for your students. With the focus on standards and testing, it is more important than ever that we help our students develop essential habits and competencies to support their ongoing personal well-being. Good grades and high test scores are not accomplished by hours of study and preparation alone.

Helping students identify their strengths, talents, and purposes during their adolescent development can impact their identity in a positive way and empower them in ways that will lead to a more successful transition from high school to college to adulthood. Skills that will help them enter the workforce and contribute to their society in a positive fashion are important and can be studied through themes related to personal well-being habits. Personal well-being habits and social emotional learning skills can be the focus of psychology lessons but can also be integrated into other subjects.To teach these skills, seven research-based habits of well-being (i.e., relationships, caring, flow, health and wellness, positive mindset, meaning (or purpose), and strengths) can be integrated into units of study.

The science of subjective well-being (SWB) is an area that is growing in interest and relevance for educators at all grade levels**.** In the April 2014 issue of ***Teaching of Psychology***, Diener and Scollon wrote about why teaching about SWB would be beneficial to college students, with excellent suggestions and sample syllabus topics. They reviewed some key findings on the benefits of SWB and provided a brief discussion on teaching tools and methods. All of the suggestions in the article could be applied to a high school psychology course.

Martin Seligman, in ***Flourish*,** identified three good reasons that well-being should be taught in schools, the first two being “the current flood of depression and the nominal increase in happiness over the last two generations” (Seligman, 2011, p.80). It is the third reason that strongly supports why we should include well-being in school curriculum – “greater well-being enhances learning.” If your students are able to pay attention and think critically and creatively they will have a more positive learning experience. They will be more successful in the real world, outside of our classroom. As teachers, this is our ultimate goal. Exploring elements of well-being and learning how to increase one’s ability to “flourish” is beneficial to us in our personal lives as well as in our professional roles as teachers.

In looking for materials that could be used at the high school level, one could be overwhelmed by the number of books, journal articles and web sites that are available. How you might integrate topics related to the science of well-being into your semester or year-long class will depend on many factors. What follows are some topics and resources that I recommend. I have also posted resources and suggestions on how they might be used in your course on my wiki (<http://getpsyched.wikispaces.com/>).

A great resource you can use to introduce your students to this topic is the TOPSS unit lesson plan on **Positive Psychology**: <http://www.apa.org/ed/precollege/topss/lessons/index.aspx>. It can be used as a supplement to your social psychology unit or as an introduction to a more extensive unit on positive psychology and well-being, depending on the time you have and the curriculum standards you are addressing.

***Authentic Happiness* (**Seligman, 2002**)** introduced the public to the new positive psychology research. In ***Flourish*** *(*Seligman*,* 2011), Dr. Seligman re-defined the goal of positive psychology, stating it should be to increase flourishing. He identified five elements of well-being: Positive emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment (PERMA). All are measurable and all contribute to well-being. These books could be used as supplementary texts in your classroom, or might be read in preparation for literature circle discussions, or other research based assignments. Along with these books, I highly recommend you use the **Authentic Happiness** website: [**https://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/home**](https://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/home)**.** Here you can learn about Positive Psychology through readings, videos, research, and questionnaires that can be used for discussion related to research, or personal exploration and reflection. If you want your students to participate in the latest research, the Positive Psychology Center at the University of Pennsylvania, headed by Dr. Seligman, conducts online research studies. Most are for individuals 18 and over, but sometime there are studies that younger age groups can participate in. Connected to this site is the **World Well-Being Project (WWBP):** [**http://www.wwbp.org/**](http://www.wwbp.org/)**.** WWBP is a group of computer scientists, psychologists, and statisticians collaborating to develop new techniques for measuring psychological and medical well-being based on language in social media.

**Ed Diener (**[**http://internal.psychology.illinois.edu/~ediener/index.html**](http://internal.psychology.illinois.edu/~ediener/index.html) **)** is a leading researcher in positive psychology who coined the expression “subjective well-being” or SWB as the aspect of happiness that can be empirically measured. From his website you have access to resources including reprints of articles, scales, and his current research. Deiner has studied 155 countries in the world, working with the **Gallop World Poll**, and discusses the happiest and unhappiest places in an interesting video, *Happiest Place on Earth by Professor Ed Diener*, available on youtube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WaHO1OHNc2s>. I usually show part of the video to my students in class, and assign the remainder of it for homework. Questions could be assigned specific to the contents of the video, for writing assignments, and/or in preparation for class discussion or online forums.

**Daniel Kahneman** is an internationally renowned psychologist whose work spans cognitive psychology, behavioral economics, and the science of well-being. Measuring individuals’ degree of happiness, what people want, what they enjoy –SWB– is hard to measure but Kahneman believes it is important to pursue. He discusses what he calls the “puzzles” that surround well-being and happiness findings in the video *Explorations of the Mind: Well-Being with Daniel Kahneman,* that can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f7cECaUAnTQ>. It is an excellent source of information for various student assignments, including research.

In 2008, **Gallup and Healthways** initiated a 25-year partnership merging decades of clinical research and development expertise, health leadership, and behavioral economics research to track and understand the key factors that drive well-being (see <http://www.healthways.com/solution/default.aspx?id=1125>). This historic partnership marked a transformation for American health by developing a new national measure of well-being that provides leaders with the information they need to create solutions for making Americans healthier. The **Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index** (<http://info.healthways.com/wbi2013>) provides an in-depth, real-time view of Americans' well-being. The Well-Being Index includes topics like physical and emotional health, healthy behaviors, work environment, social and community factors, financial security, and access to necessities such as food, shelter and healthcare. My students really found this information enlightening along with links I used from the **OECD Better Life Index** (<http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/>).TheBetter Life Index is designed to identify and compare some of the key factors that contribute to well-being in OECD countries. It’s an [interactive tool](http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/) that allows you to see how countries perform according to the importance *you* give to each of the topics that make for a better life. Students rank 11 topics most important to them and this information enters a publicly accessible database, enabling them to compare “your” own Better Life Index with the Indexes of other people around the world and see who else shares their view of the most important issues related to well-being; these are great activities for discussion, research and personal exploration and reflection.

An abundance of books have been written over the past 20 years, addressing the research and application of many key concepts associated with the science of well-being. I highly recommend you check out **Activities for Teaching Positive Psychology: A Guide for Instructors** (Froh & Parks, 2012). On my wiki (<http://getpsyched.wikispaces.com/>) I have posted a list of other resources, along with suggestions of how you might use them with your students.

You could spend months searching websites that have been created gathering information to supplement your lessons. Here are a few to get you started. Check my wiki for many more!

**Positive Psychology Laboratory** [**http://sonjalyubomirsky.com/**](http://sonjalyubomirsky.com/)

With Professor Lyubomirsky,University of California, Riverside. Provides papers, publications, full text articles, and current research in the Positive Psychology Laboratory.

**"The Scientific Pursuit of Happiness"** [**http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y3huf9nArhY**](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y3huf9nArhY)

This keynote lecture by David Myers addresses factors surrounding our understanding of what it is to be "happy" -- including relationships, religious faith, wealth, gender, and a variety of character traits. This is an excellent introduction to the science of happiness and well-being research.

**Authentic Happiness** [**https://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/home**](https://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/home)

With Dr. Seligman, University of Pennsylvania. Here you can learn about Positive Psychology through readings, videos, research, surveys, and more.

**Society of Counseling Psychology (APA Division 17) Section on Positive Psychology** [**http://www.div17pospsych.com/**](http://www.div17pospsych.com/)

This site includes information about positive psychology research, teaching, and practice as well as events, strengths based books, and resources.

**The Greater Good Science Center** [**http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/**](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/)

This site studies the psychology, sociology, and neuroscience of well-being. Links to Core Themes include readings, videos, and activities.

**Wellbeing Wizard** [**http://www.wellbeingwizard.com/index.php**](http://www.wellbeingwizard.com/index.php)

This is an interactive website, with links to many other resources that students would find interesting.

[**Pursuit-of-Happiness.org (Teaching Happiness Inc.)**](http://www.pursuit-of-happiness.org/teaching-resources/)  [**http://www.pursuit-of-happiness.org/**](http://www.pursuit-of-happiness.org/)

This site provides educators, students, and the general public with free access to clear, concise, information on the history and scientific study of human happiness, positive psychology and mental well-being in general. **History** **links** explore the ideas of major thinkers, from East and West, who devoted much of their lives to the pursuit of happiness. **Science links** review scientific studies that have been conducted, providing comprehensive reviews of each key study, video and annotated bibliographies.

**TED** **Talks**: [**http://www.ted.com/topics/happiness**](http://www.ted.com/topics/happiness)

This site features exclusive articles and playlists on Happiness.

***TED: Understanding Happiness*** [**http://www.wiley.com/WileyCDA/Section/id-814228.html**](http://www.wiley.com/WileyCDA/Section/id-814228.html)

This site can enhance existing curricula in undergraduate education courses. Educators and students will find activities and multimedia resources which link the study of happiness to the real world, plus expanded academic content such as key terms, related journal articles and classic experiments

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**About the Author:**

Debra Park is a part time Lecturer at Rutgers University-Camden NJ, Psychology Department, as well as the Institute for Effective Education where she teaches Lifespan Development, Psychology of Happiness and Well-Being, and Behavior Management. Debra taught high school AP Psychology for 33 years. At present, she is the Membership Committee Chair for the Society for the Teaching of Psychology (STP), Division 2 of APA. If you are interested in attending or hosting workshops for teachers on experiencing well-being and teaching about well-being, contact her for more information. [debpark@camden.rutgers.edu](mailto:debpark@camden.rutgers.edu)

<http://getpsyched.wikispaces.com/>

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